

P. Jackson, P.

Files on Mafia, CIA Plot to Kill Castro Disclosed

BY ROBERT L. JACKSON
and RONALD J. OSTROW

Times Staff Writers

WASHINGTON—The Rockefeler commission is obtaining long-secret Justice Department files that detail how underworld figures once cooperated with the Central Intelligence Agency in a plot to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

The existence of these records, kept in a locked safe, was disclosed to the commission headed by the Vice President earlier this month by Will R. Wilson, formerly head of the Justice Department's criminal division. It was learned Tuesday.

Wilson confirmed in an interview that he had testified about the files "with the permission of the Justice Department." The records are understood to name Chicago gangster Giancana and an associate, Johnny Rosseli, as part of the planned CIA operation in 1961. Rosseli, now a Florida resident, lived in Los Angeles in 1961.

Plans to kill Castro reportedly began as part of the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in April, 1961, and continued sporadically until 1963.

A. William Olson, another former assistant attorney general and now a Pasadena lawyer, said that the CIA-related documents might include correspondence between the FBI and the intelligence agency as well as Justice Department memos.

"I remember there being a highly classified file," said Olson, who headed the department's internal security division from 1972 to 1973. "There were memos and a number of letters,

possibly requests for information from the FBI to the CIA."

Olson said the file showed that "there were some abortive attempts made on the life of Castro that our government had something to do with."

Wilson refused to give details about a statement to the Rockefeller commission. He noted that the presidentially appointed panel was to report on its investigation of the CIA's operations next month.

"All those records were classified secret in the Justice Department," he said.

Wilson quit the department in October, 1971, while under fire for his involvement in a Texas banking scandal. He now practices law in Austin.

White House and Justice Department sources said the documents were being assembled for the commission by John C. Keeney, acting head of the department's criminal division.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities learned of the documents several weeks ago and also has asked for them, committee sources said.

Recently as last week, Justice Department spokesman Robert L. Stevenson told The Times that there were no records connecting Rosseli with a CIA assassination plot. Stevenson said he had checked with the organized crime section of the criminal division.

The records apparently have been tightly held. One former internal security division official, who refused to let his name be used, said that the documents had been kept in a special safe and that the key was entrusted only to the division head.

Reports that Rosseli, a protege of Giancana, had been involved in CIA-backed attempts to kill Castro were first published by columnist Jack Anderson in January, 1971.

Anderson said that Rosseli either had helped plan or direct six attempts on Castro's life. On two occasions Rosseli arranged with Cubans to plant poison capsules in Castro's food, and on other occasions rifle squads were sent to Cuba, the columnist said, but the attempts were unsuccessful.

In July, 1971, when Rosseli was seeking a reduced sentence after his

conviction in the Beverly Hills Friar's Club card-cheating case, his attorney referred to his work for the CIA in open court.

Attorney Adrian P. Marshall said that Rosseli had "rendered a valuable and dangerous service to the country" by taking part in a mission to kill Castro. Rosseli "had a boat shot out from under him" en route to Cuba, Marshall said.

Giancana is believed by government sources to have had a twofold motive for arranging Rosseli's participation in assassination plots:

As perennial targets of federal prosecutors, the racketeers hoped to build credit for any possible future actions against them. They hoped also, by eliminating Castro, to be able to reopen lucrative gambling casinos that had been closed by the Cuban leader.

It remains unclear how high government circles—even within the CIA—the knowledge or approval of the murder plans extended at that time.

The Associated Press reported Tuesday that then-Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy apparently had not known about the Giancana-Rosseli involvement until 1962.

The AP quoted an unidentified former CIA official as saying that he had first informed Kennedy of their role in 1962, and that Kennedy had replied: "The next time you deal with the Mafia, come to me first."

The New York Times reported that Justice Department documents included memoranda to Kennedy from

J. Edgar Hoover, then head of the FBI, expressing concern that Giancana had received favorable treatment from the department in 1964 because of his CIA activities.

The purported favorable treatment Hoover referred to was a decision not to recall Giancana before a second federal grand jury in Chicago after he had been jailed 12 months for refusing to testify before the first one. The grand jury was investigating organized crime.

However, William G. Handley, head of the Justice Department's organized crime section at that time, said that he never knew of any Giancana involvement with the CIA. He said Giancana had not been brought before another grand jury because such action would have amounted to

CIA 7.02 Rockefeller
Comm

CIA 4.01 Assassins

Trea

ORG / MAFIA

Rosseli; John